

The Alagoas (Eastern-Brazil Razor-Billed) Curassow - *Mitu mitu* (L.) - a World rarity in the collection of the National Museum of Natural History, Sofia (Aves: Galliformes: Cracidae)

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The genus *Mitu* Lesson, 1831

The genus *Mitu* (and all the family Cracidae) are South-American endemics. It includes four recent species: Crestless - *M. tomentosa* (Spix, 1825), Salvin's - *M. salvini* (Reinhardt, 1870), Razor-billed - *M. tuberosa* (Spix, 1825) and Alagoas - *M. mitu* (Linnaeus, 1766) curassows. All species of *Mitu* form superspecies and all have been referred to genus *Crax*. *M. tuberosa* and *M. mitu* are considered conspecific (del HOYO, 1994). "*Crax m. mitu* can be considered a superspecies that includes *C. m. tuberosa* as an allospecies" (SICK, 1993).

The range and status of *M. tuberosa*

The range of *M. tuberosa* covers a large territory of the forest part of the catchment area of Amazon river, practically, all its southern half (DELACOUR, AMADON, 1973; del HOYO, 1994). PETERS (1934) defines that the species area covers "the greater part of the Guianian-Amazonian forest from eastern Peru to Pará". Individuals of *M. tuberosa* are often bred as cage and voliery semidomesticated birds. The species is also highly valued as a hunting object for its tasty meat and large body mass (Table 1). Local indian people also find its meat good and the species is one of the traditional game birds for them too (GOELDI, 1894).

The range and status of *M. mitu*

M. mitu is confined to the primary "litoral or coastal forest" (SICK, 1993, p. 5, Fig. 2). It was reported only for the bank lowland forests along the lowest reaches of San Francisco River in the Brazilian state Alagoas in a territory of 60 000 sq. km. *M. mitu* replaces *M. tuberosa* in residual forest of northeast (SICK, 1993). He writes, that the

species has been first reported in the scientific literature by MARCGRAVE (1648) in Pernambuco state. Between 17th and 19th century *M. mitu* has disappeared from Pernambuco and in the early 20th century has survived only in the Alagoas state.

The species has been considered extinct for a century till 1951 when an adult female bird was collected by Oliverio Pinto at Sao Miguel dos Campos in NE Brazil, where the species survived by the 1970's. In a forest area of 8500 ha a total of 20 individuals have been recorded. In 1970 only 2000 sq. km. of these forest have remained in the state of Alagoas. Sick mentions that "The only individuals in captivity were obtained ... in Alagoas since 1976 and are in the Mario Nardelli Zoological Collection in Nilopolis, Rio de Janeiro. The species survival can only be assured by captive breeding."

Today the Alagoas curassow is considered one of the rarest avian species of the World. Its survival is critically endangered and possibly the species is extinct because of the overhunting and the drastic devastation of habitats - lowland coastal rain forests. DELACOUR, AMADON (1973), HOWARD, MOORE (1980) and KING (1981) indicate that this form is possibly extinct from the last breeding site in the wild in Eastern Brazil. Two birds have been killed by hunters in 1984 and 1987 and they appear to be the last representatives of that species recorded in the wild. In more recent literature (SICK, 1993; del HOYO (1994) *M. mitu* is considered "probably now extinct ...", besides its status as an "Endangered" species listed in the CITES I category, which needs urgent conservation action.

Determination of *M. tuberosa* and *M. mitu*

Only *M. salvini* has white underparts in the genus. *M. tomentosa* has chestnut underparts and chestnut tip of the tail feathers (del HOYO, 1994), so both species may be excluded. SICK (1993) and del HOYO (1994) indicate the following features for *M. tuberosa*:

- 1) orange bare ring around eyes;
- 2) black crest of feathers on head;
- 3) massive casque-like bill;
- 4) black head, neck, breast, belly, back, and wings (scaly ornamented);
- 5) black tail with snowy-white tip of the feathers;
- 6) chestnuts undertail-coverts and caudo-lateral parts of thighs;
- 7) black and sharp claws;
- 8) orange bare scaly tarsal parts and toes of the legs.

Additionally, SICK (1993) gives the following distinguishing features for *M. mitu*: "Bill moderate sized, not swollen, anterior half whitish; area around ear bare; tail all black or with outer tail feathers showing slender, whitish brown tip" (SICK, 1993).

The features of the NMNH-Sofia specimen differ clearly (No. 1, 3, 5, 7 and 8) and coincide with this characterization of *M. mitu*.

The del HOYO'S (1994) specific features for *M. mitu* are as follows (except the common ones with *M. tuberosa*):

- 1) pale brown (pale chestnut) rather than pure white tail tips;
- 2) two-tone coloring of the bill - pink base and whitish distal half of the bill;

- 3) absence of casque on the bill;
- 4) bare patch of skin around the ears.

Table 1

Body measurements of *M. tuberosa* and *M. mitu* (After DELACOUR, AMADON, 1973 and del HOYO, 1994. Lengths in mm, weight in g)

	<i>M. tuberosa</i>	<i>M. mitu</i>
Body length	830-890	c. 830
Wing length	376-435 (399) males 348-385 (368) females	
Tail length	315-355 (334) males 290-340 (313) females	
Tarsus length	94-122	
Body mass	up to 3 860	2745-2960

The specimen of NMNH-Sofia shows full resemblance with the features No. 2, 3 and has not "pale brown", but has dirty whitish tips of the tail feathers (sometimes observed in some individuals /del HOYO, 1994/). It also have not clear "bare skin around ear".

DELACOUR, AMADON (1973) give the following characters attributed to *M. mitu*:

- 1) less white at the tip of the tail;
- 2) less elevated culmen.

Both characters are presented in the NMNH-Sofia specimen.

The text of the original label is as follows: "*Mitua mitu* L.; No. 620, South America (Guyana, Amazon river). Received in the Royal Zoological Garden on 20 May 1924 and lived till 9 February 1938". The measurements of this specimen are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Body measurements (in mm) of the NMNH-Sofia specimen No. 620 of *M. mitu* (Only 1st and 2nd toes of the specimen have well developed claws)

Measurement	
Total length	900
Length of the tail	330
Tarsus length	120
Wing length	398
Length of the bill (by horde)	59,7
Length of the bill (by bow)	66
Length of the mandibular symphysis (with horny cover)	19,8
Width of the bill at the base of nostrils	17,9
Length of the 1st toe with claw*	38,9
Length of the 2nd toe with claw	58,2
Length of the 3rd toe with claw	70
Length of the 4th toe with claw	50,6
Length of the white tips of the axial tail feathers	42,5

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Златозар БОЕВ

(Резюме)

Алагоаският кракс се счита за изчезнал вид през последното десетилетие от влажните тропически крайбрежни гори покрай долното течение на р. Сан Франциско в бразилския щат Алагоас. Белезите, отличаващи го от най-близкия до него вид, остроклюния кракс (*Mitu tuberosa* Spix, 1825), са: отсъствие на масивно подуване (фронтално разширение върху максилата - „каска“), двуцветен клюн (розовочервен в основата и белезникав към върха) и наличие на гола кожа край ушите. По първите два признака съвсем ясно и по третия, отчасти, препаратът с No. 620 от колекцията на музея е определен като *Mitu mitu*. Постъпил е в музея, след като е живял 14 години в Царската зоологическа градина (20.05.1924 - 09.02.1938).